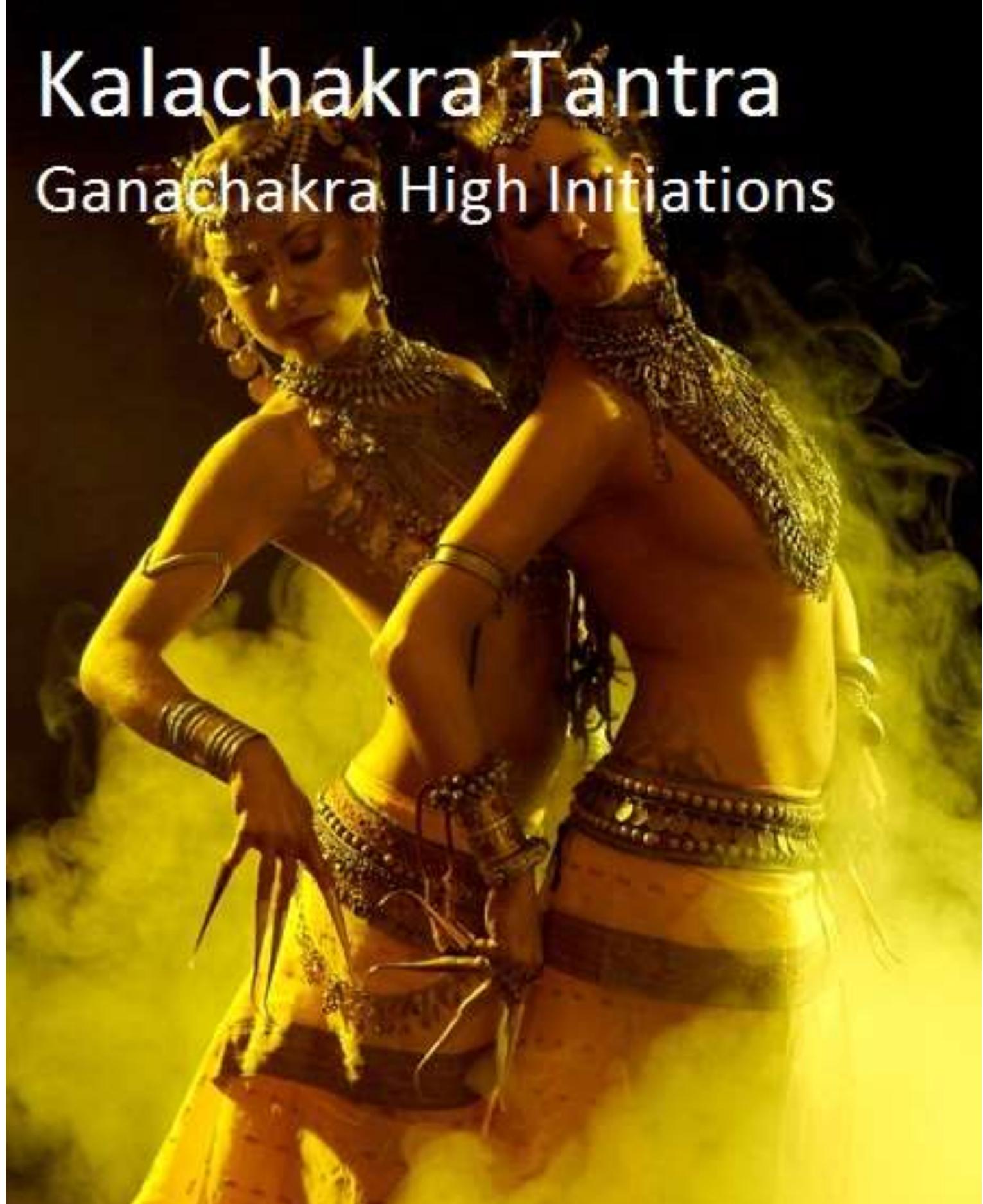


Kalachakra Tantra

Ganachakra High Initiations



book of formulas into the river. It was fished out by a bathing prostitute and returned to the master. He saw this as a higher sign and began anew with his experimentation with the assistance of the hetaera. But once more nothing succeeded, until one evening his assistant spilt a liquid into the mixture. Suddenly, within seconds, the elixir of life had been created, which Nagarjuna had labored fourteen years in vain to discover.

Anyone who knows the tantras would be aware that the prostitute was a dakini and that the wonderful liquid was either the female seed or menstrual blood. Nagarjuna could thus only attain his goal once he included a *mudra* in his alchemical experiments. For this reason, among the Alchemists of India a “female laboratory assistant” was always necessary to complete the “great work” (White, 1996, p. 6).

There are also European manuals of the “great art” which require that one work with the “menstrual blood of a whore”. In one relevant text can be read: “Eve keeps the female seed” (Jung, 1968, p. 320). Even the retention of sperm and its transmutation into something higher is known in the west. Hence the seventeenth-century doctor from Brussels, Johannes Baptista Helmont, states that, “If semen is not emitted, it is changed into a spiritual force that preserves its capacities to reproduce sperm and invigorates breath emitted in speech” (Couliano, 1987, p. 102). Giordano Bruno, the heretic among the Renaissance philosophers, wrote a comprehensive essay on the manipulation of erotic love through the retention of semen and for the purposes of attaining power.

“Ganachakra” and the four “highest” initiations

The initiation path of the *Kalachakra Tantra*, to which we now return following this detour into the world of seed gnosis, now leads us on to the four highest initiations, or rather to the twelfth to fifteenth initiation stages. The reader will soon see that we are dealing with an extended copy of the four “higher initiations” (8–11). They thus also bear the same names: (12) the vase initiation; (13) the secret initiation; (14) the wisdom initiation; and (15) the word initiation. The difference primarily consists in the fact that rather than just one *mudra*, ten wisdom consorts now participate in the ritual. All ten must be offered to the master by the pupil (Naropa, 1994, p. 193). There are different rules for monks and laity in this regard. It is required of a layman that the *mudras* be members of his own family — his mother, his sister, his daughter, his sister-in-law, and so on (Naropa, 1994, p. 192). This makes it *de facto* impossible for him to receive the *Kalachakra* solemnity. Although the same commandment applies to a monk, it is interpreted symbolically in his case. Hence, he has to deliver to his guru numerous girls from the lower castes, who then adopt the names and roles of the various female relatives during the ritual. Among other things the elements are assigned to them: the “mother” is earth, the “sister” water, the “daughter” fire, the “sister’s daughter” is the wind, and so on (Grünwedel, *Kalacakra III*, p. 125).

After the pupil has handed the women over to his master, he is given back one of them as a symbolic “spouse” for the impending rites (Naropa, 1994, p. 193). There are thus ten women present on the tantric ritual stage — one as the “wife” of the *sadhaka* and nine as substitutes for the rest of his female relatives. The master now chooses one of these for himself. The chosen wisdom consort bears the name of *Shabdvajra*. It is prescribed that she be between twelve and twenty years old and have already menstruated. First the guru fondles the jewelry of the young women, then he undresses her and finally embraces her. The tantric couple are surrounded by the remaining eight women along with the pupil and his “spouse” in a circle. All the *yoginis* have a particular cosmic meaning and are assigned to among other things the points of the compass. Each of them is naked and has let down her hair so as to evoke the wild appearance of a *dakini*. In their hands the women hold a human skull filled with various repulsive substances and a cleaver (Naropa, 1994, p. 193/194).

The guru now moves to the center of the circle (*chakra*) and performs a magic dance. Subsequently he unites with *Shabdvajra* in the divine yoga, by inserting “the jewel of his *vajra*” (his phallus) into her (Naropa, 1994, p. 194). After he has withdrawn his member again, in the words of Naropa, the following happens: “He places his *vajra* [phallus], which is filled with semen in the mouth [of the pupil]”. After that the master gives him his own *mudra*, whom he has already embraced” (Naropa, 1994, p. 194,195). On the basis of the texts before us we have been unable to determine whether or not the pupil now couples with the girl. This part of the ritual is referred to as the vase initiation and forms the twelfth initiation level.

In the secret initiation (13) which now follows, “the master must lay his own *vajra* [phallus] in the mouth of the pupil’s wife and, whilst the pupil is blindfolded, he [the guru] must suck upon the *Naranasika* of the wisdom consort” (Naropa, 1994, p. 195). Translated from Sanskrit, *naranasika* means ‘clitoris’. “Then,” Naropa continues, “the master must give his own *mudra* to the pupil with the idea that she is his wife” (Naropa, 1994, p. 195). This passage remains a little unclear, since he has already given a *mudra* to the pupil as “wife” during the preceding vase initiation (12).

During the following wisdom initiation (14), the *sadhaka*, surrounded by the remaining women, unites firstly with the *mudra* which the guru has let him have. But it does not remain just the one. “Since it is a matter of ten *mudras*, the master must offer the pupil as many of them as he is able to sexually possess, and that in two periods of 24 minutes each, beginning from midnight until the sun rises”, Naropa reports (Naropa, 1994, p. 195). He thus has tenfold sexual intercourse in the presence of the master and the remaining women.

In contrast to his guru, the *sadhaka* may under no circumstances express his semen during the ritual; rather he must only bring his drops of *bodhicitta* to the tip of his penis and then draw up the *semen feminine* of one *yogini* after another (Naropa, 1994, p. 196). Should he not succeed, he is

condemned to hell. There is, however, still a chance for him to escape divine judgment: "If, due to a weakness of the spirit, the *bodhicitta* [semen] is spilled in the vulva, then it is advisable to collect with the tongue that of it which remains outside of the lotus [vagina]" (Naropa, 1994, p. 196).

The fourth, word initiation (15) designates the "supreme state of perfection". In the three prior initiations the sadhaka has drawn off the *gynergy* of his partners and reached a state of bliss. He has now become a *vajra* master himself. This is the result of the inner energy processes in his mystic body, which he has completed during the ritual and which we describe in the next chapter.

What happens now, at the end of this "disciplined" orgy, to the women who participated in the "witches' Sabbath"? The sources are scant. But we nonetheless have access to a translation from the third chapter of the *Kalachakra Tantra* by Albert Grünwedel. This is to be treated with great caution, but taking into account the concreteness of the images the translator can not have made many errors here. Grünwedel tells us that, "At the end of the solemnity a breast-jacket, beneficial to her tender body, is to be given to the blessed earthly formed [i.e., the *karma mudras* mentioned above]. Holy yoginis are to be given another breast-jacket with a skirt" (Grünwedel, *Kalacakra III*, p. 201). And in the following section the tantra recommends giving the girls scented flowers, fruit, and a scarf as mementos of the unique rendezvous (Grünwedel, *Kalacakra III*, p. 202).

The four-stage ritual just described is known as *Ganachakra*. It is the deepest secret of the *Kalachakra Tantras*, but is also known in the other Highest Tantras. Now, at which secret locations are such *Ganachakras* carried out? The famous (fourteenth-century) Tibetan historian, Buston, suggests using "one's own house, a hidden, deserted or also agreeable location, a mountain, a cave, a thicket, the shores of a large lake, a cemetery, a temple of the mother goddess" (Herrmann-Pfand, 1992, p. 376). Not recommendable are, in contrast, the home of a Brahman or noble, a royal palace or a monastery garden. The *Hevajra Tantra* is more degenerate and less compromising regarding the choice of location for the *Ganachakra* ritual: "These feasts must be held in cemeteries, in mountain groves or deserted places which are frequented by non-human beings. It must have nine seats which are made of parts of corpses, tiger skins or rags which come from a cemetery. In the middle can be found the master, who represents the god *Hevajra*, and round about the yoginis ... are posted" (Naropa, 1994, p. 46). With the guru in the center these form a magic circle, a living *mandala*.

The number of participating yoginis differs from tantra to tantra. It ranges from eight to sixty-four. Numbers like the latter appear unrealistic. Yet one must bear in mind that in the past *Ganachakras* were also carried out by powerful oriental rulers, who would hardly have had difficulties organizing this considerably quantity of women together in one place. It is, however, highly unlikely that these tantra masters copulated with all 64 yoginis in one night.

Various ritual objects are handed to the women during the ritual of which the majority, if not all, are of an aggressive nature: cleavers, swords, bone trumpets, skulls, skewers. As a cult meal the above-mentioned holy nectars are served: excrement, human flesh, and the meat of various taboo animals. To drink there is menstrual blood, urine, semen, and so forth. The third chapter of the *Kalachakra Tantra* recommends “slime, snot, tears, fat, saliva, filth, feces, urine, marrow, excrement, liver, gall, blood, skin, flesh, sperm, entrails” (Grünwedel, *Kalacakra* III, p. 155).

The sacrificial flesh of the “sevenfold born” which we mention above is, when available, also offered as a sacred food at a *Ganachakra*. In the story which frames a tantric tale, the *Vajradakinigiti*, several dakinis kill a sevenfold-born king’s son in order to make a sacrificial meal of his flesh and blood. Likewise, two scenes from the life of the *Kalachakra* master Tilopa are known in which the consumption of a “sevenfold born” at a dakini feast is mentioned (Herrmann-Pfand, 1992, pp. 393-394).

Albert Grünwedel believed that the female partners of the gurus were originally sacrificed at the *Ganachakra* and in fact were burned at the stake like European witches so as to then be resurrected as “dakinis”, as tantric demonesses. His hypothesis is difficult to confirm on the basis of the available historical evidence. Nonetheless, as far as the symbolic significance of the ritual is concerned, we can safely assume that we are here dealing with a sacrificial ceremony. For example, Buston (14th century), in connection with the highest *Kalachakra* initiations and thus also in relation to the *Ganachakra*, speaks of “secret victims” (Herrmann-Pfand, 1992, p. 386). The ten *karma mudras* present during the ritual go by the name of “sacrificial goddesses”. One event in the *Ganachakra* proceedings is known as “sacrifice of the assembly”, which can only have meant the sacrifice of the women present (Herrmann-Pfand, 1992, p. 386). A further interpreter of the tantras, Abhinavagupta, refers to the *Ganachakra* as the “sacrifice of the wheel” (*chakra* means ‘wheel’) or as the “highest sacrifice” (Naropa, 1994, p. 46).

Everything which we have said about the “tantric female sacrifice” is without doubt also true for the *Ganachakra*. There are documents which prove that such sacrifices were really carried out. In the eleventh century a group of the notorious “robber monks” became prominent, of whom the following can be read in the *Blue Annals*: “The doctrine of the eighteen [robber monks] consisted of a corrupt form of the tantric praxis, they kidnapped women and men and were in the habit of performing human sacrifices during the tantric feasts (*ganacakra - puja*)” (*Blue Annals*, 1995, p. 697). Such excesses were criticized already by the traditional Tibetan historians, albeit with a certain leniency. Thus the Fifth Dalai Lama, who himself wrote a history of Tibet, exonerated the guru of the eighteen robber monks, Prajnagupta by name, of all guilt, whilst he condemned his “pupils” as the guilty party (Herrmann-Pfand, 1992, p. 418, note 11).

Obviously, a Buddhist *Ganachakra* is always led by a man. Yet, like much in Tantrism, this ritual also seems to have had a matriarchal origin. The Indologist Marie-Thérèse de Mallmann describes in detail such a gynocentric “circle feast” from the sixth century. It was staged by a powerful oriental queen. In one document it is said of her that, “through her [the queen], the circle king was reduced to the role of a sacrifice which was performed in the circle (*chakra*) of the goddesses” (Mallmann, 1963, p. 172). It thus involved the carrying out of a king sacrifice, found in many ancient matriarchal cultures, in which the old king was replaced by a new one. The sacrificial victim here is at any rate a man. In the *Ganachakra* of Buddhist Tantrism precisely the opposite took place! The yoginis are sacrificed and the guru elevates himself to the triumphant king of the circle.

The gynocentric ritual was also known under the names of “wheel of the goddesses”, “wheel of the mother” or “wheel of the witches”. Its wide distribution in the fifth and sixth centuries, above all in Kashmir, supports our above hypothesis, that there was a powerful reawakening of old matriarchal cults in India during this period.

Contemporary feminism has also rediscovered the matriarchal origins of the *Ganachakra*. Adelheid Herrmann-Pfand is able to refer to several somewhat ambivalent Tibetan textual passages in which in her view *Ganachakras* were formerly directed by women (Herrmann-Pfand, 1992, pp. 379, 479). She therefore reaches the conclusion that this ritual is a matter of a “patriarchal usurpation” of a matriarchal cult.

Miranda Shaw on the other hand, can almost be said to revel in the idea of “female witch circles” and takes every *Ganachakra* which is mentioned in the tantras to be a purely female feast. She reverses the proceedings outright: “*Tantric literature*”, the feminist writes, “records numerous instances wherein yogis gain admittance to an assembly of yoginis. Inclusion in a yogini feast is seen as a high honor for a male practitioner. In the classic scenario, a yogi unexpectedly finds himself in the presence of a convocation of yoginis, perhaps in the depths of a forest, a deserted temple, or a cremation ground. He seeks entry to their assembly circle and feasts with them, receives initiation from them, and obtains magical lore and tantric teachings” (Shaw, 1994, p. 82). Based upon what we have analyzed to date, Shaw’s interpretation cannot be dismissed out of hand. In Buddhist Tantrism women were indeed accorded all power, it is just that at the end of the game the *gynergy* and power of the woman have, through the accomplished use of method (*upaya*), landed in the hands of the male guru.

As always, in this case too the question emerges as to whether the *Ganachakra* is to be understood as real or “just” symbolically. Texts by Sapan (thirteenth century) and Bustom (fourteenth century) leave no doubt about its really being conducted. Alexandra David Néel nevertheless concludes that the sacrificial feast in the described form have no longer been

practiced in our century. Symbolic stagings, in which no real women participate and are replaced by substitutes such as vases, are a different matter. According to statements by modern lamas, such ersatz *Ganachakras* were widespread up until the Chinese occupation (Herrmann-Pfand, 1992, p. 416).

We would like to briefly discuss whether we are dealing with an orgy in the case of the *Ganachakra*. Archaic people understood an orgy to be indiscriminate sexual mixing within a group. It was precisely the chaotic, ecstatic, and uncontrolled behavior of the participants determined the course of events amid the general promiscuity. Through the orgy ordered time was suspended, there was no hierarchy among the participants. For a few hours the “profane” state of established social order seceded to the “holy” turbulence of chaos. Usually, this occurred so as to invoke the fertility of the earth. It was agricultural and horticultural societies who preferentially fostered the orgy as a high point of their sacred rites. In contrast, the Buddhist *Ganachakra* must be seen as a controlled performance from start to finish. Admittedly it does make use of elements of the orgy (group sexuality and the wild dances of the yoginis), but the tantra master always maintains complete control over events.

Thus, at the end of this presentation of the fifteen initiation stages of the *Kalachakra Tantra* we can establish that all the essential features which we described in the general section on Tantrism reemerge in this “highest” occult teaching of Tibetan Buddhism: the absorption of *gynergy*, the alchemic transmutation of sexual energy, indeed from sexual fluids into androcentric power, the creation of androgyny, the sacrifice of the *mudra* and the *sadhaka*, the destruction of people to the benefit of the gods, and so on. To this extent the *Kalachakra* in essence does not differ from the other tantric systems of teachings. It is simply more comprehensive, magnificent and logically consistent. Additionally, there is its political eschatology, which allowed it to become the state tantra of Lamaism and which we still have to explore.

All the events in the tantric performance which we have described so far have been played out in the external world, in the system of rituals, the sexual magic practices and perceptible reality. The final goal of this visible tantric endeavor is that the yogi absorb all of the energies set free during the ritual (those of the *mudra*, the pupil, and the evoked deities). Only thus can he become the ONE who concentrates within himself the “many”, but above all the masculine and feminine principles, so as to subsequently, in a still to be described second phase, bring it all forth again. From here on he has first reached his perfected form, that of the ADI BUDDHA (the Highest Buddha), who in Tantrism is the ultimate cause of all appearances.

Footnotes:

[1] The self-sacrifice (*chod*): in the *chod* ritual the pupil, in order to attain enlightenment, offers his own body up to be devoured by the dakinis (who, as we know, represent his master). It preferably takes place at burial grounds. The flesh-devourers appear in the dark of night or at full moon and begin to tear the candidate's skin from his body and to tear him apart piece by piece down to the bone. Even then they do not pause, and instead with a dreadful cracking finally consume the bones and marrow. The initiate "dies" in the process and all of his bodily parts are destroyed. With this he achieves complete liberation from all that is earthly and makes the jump into a state of enlightenment. *De facto*, this ritual killing only takes place symbolically — not, however, in the imagination of the pupil — there the scene is experienced with real emotion, as in a dream. This is almost unbearable for people who behave purely passively. On her travels in Tibet, Alexandra David-Neel encountered ghostly figures, shunned by all, who wandered around lost and insane because they had not mentally survived the *chod* ceremonies. For this reason, the ritual also prescribes that the adept should imagine himself as not just the victim, but likewise as the active party, the sacrificer in the form of a goddess or a dakini. "As soon as your consciousness enters the body of the goddess, imagine that your former body is now a corpse which slumps to the ground. ... You, who are now the goddess, use the curved knife in your right hand to cut off the skull just above the eyebrows" (Hopkins, 1982, p. 162). Afterwards the pupil, as a bloodthirsty *vajra* dakini, consumes his own body laid out before him. Thus, in this ritual he not only surrenders his life, but likewise also plays the sadistic executioner who destroys it. Since the latter is always a female being, he identifies with the imago of the evil goddess. He thereby attempts to overcome the act which he as a Tantric fears most of all, namely to be killed by the feminine, in that he carries it out on himself in the form of a woman.
